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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the role of teachers in bilingual education curriculum development is essential. The assumption is that pre-packaged curricula, programs, and materials cannot be effective because student and community needs differ from one situation to the other. Therefore, those persons involved in each situation should be the ones to develop the curriculum. In order to assume a central role in the curriculum development and implementation process, teachers need to develop skills in curriculum development as well as a critical consciousness. The first set of skills includes awareness of curriculum development as a decision-making process, the ability to perceive student needs and community culture, and skills in the instructional aspect of curriculum development. The second factor, critical consciousness, is viewed as a political act because it has to do with questions of power and powerlessness. A suggested framework for the process is the "curriculum collective," a core group of teachers and parents. This group would define itself, its tasks, and its political perspective. Teachers would interact with the collective as they implement the curriculum developed by the group. Assessment of the program would be on-going and effected through meetings among teachers, the collective, and the larger community. (AMH)

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DEVELOPING CURRICULUM FOR THE BILINGUAL CLASSROOM: TOWARD DEFINING THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

by

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I.

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education is a relatively new, or at least "reborn" educational endeavor which has a great deal of potential for effecting changes, not only in the way children learn and perform, but on a broader perspective as well. In order to effect these changes, however, the road we travel must be a new one, not the well-worn road of the past. This paper will address one particular aspect of this endeavor: the role of the teacher in developing curriculum for the bilingual classroom.

Bilingual programs and schools have been operating in this country for a relatively short time, mostly since the late 60s and early 70s. The ESEA Title VII law was passed in 1968; thereafter, demonstration projects throughout the country were funded, thus spurring the expansion of bilingual education. This law, however, was not simply given to Puerto Ricans and Chicanos on a silver platter. Rather, it was the result of intense struggle by Latino community groups

to improve educational opportunity for their children. From polite dialogue to noisy and militant take-overs and pickets in front of local boards of education, bilingual education was the demand of those who were fed up with unresponsive school systems. It is important to keep these roots in mind in developing our perspective concerning the bilingual education movement.

Title VII devoted most of its monies at first to teacher preparation (in-service was the first priority) because most teachers had not been trained in the field. Community involvement also became a priority, for obvious reasons. This resulted in community training programs as well as in para-professional training and hiring, among other programs. Later on, curriculum and materials development projects were funded. These were, nevertheless, very few and regarded as "demonstration projects." The problem that teachers had and continue to have becomes very clear: if you have no previous training in the field and no curriculum available, how do you go about creating both curriculum and materials that are responsive to the tone of the historical development of bilingual programs as well as to the interests and experiences of the students involved?

This is not to say that curriculum is not now available. On the contrary, one is amazed at the number of curricula and the variety of materials now available from commercial sources. These, however, are for the most part inappropriate for bilingual classrooms for reasons which will be pointed out later.

This paper will attempt to suggest guidelines for defining the role of teachers in developing curriculum for bilingual classrooms. Before this role can materialize, however, teachers should have developed certain skills and perspectives. These will also be discussed. Finally, strategies for teacher initiation

and development of bilingual curriculum will be recommended.

Before proceeding further, assumptions which guide this paper will be made explicit. First, it is assumed here that teachers, together with the community and students, are the ones who can best develop and guide the curriculum process. Because teachers are in constant and close contact with their students, their role in curriculum development should be central. This close contact with students should result in increased sensitivity and awareness on the part of teachers. Granted that this may not always be the case. Nevertheless, it is important to start with this premise and then later facilitate mechanisms for developing awareness.

A second assumption is that curriculum is most effective when it speaks to the real interests and needs of the students. This implies that teachers alone cannot be effective in developing curriculum. Before attempting to do so, they must first find out student needs and interests, whether through interaction, observation, or direct consultation with students.

It follows, from the above, that pre-packaged curricula are inappropriate for most bilingual classrooms. Needless to say, those who develop such curricula are either unaware of or unwilling to include the particular realities of these particular children in this particular classroom. Pre-packaged curricula are thus standardized in an attempt to handle <u>all</u> children in <u>all</u> classrooms; the result is that they deal with none of them in any meaningful way.

Further, pre-packaged curricula usually define not only the content to be "covered," but also the very methods to be employed. This negates both the creative talents of the teacher as well as the input of the children. Everything

is named and classified. Often, the only role for children and teachers is that of executing a well laid-out but sterile plan.

Another disadvantage of using pre-packaged curriculum concerns its origins. Many times, these curricula are direct translations of traditional ones. They consequently have as much meaning for bilingual classrooms as the same curricula in English. Even if they are not direct translations, they are so standardized (to include all Spanish-speaking groups) that they are either confusing or lacking in depth for most children.

When considering the origin of curriculum, we should also consider the class origin. Evidently, commercial enterprises like publishing companies are not politically neutral. Thus, they represent certain class interests. These interests are not those of the communities served by bilingual classrooms. This is therefore a question that must be dealt with in order to avoid developing curriculum that is both irrelevant and alienating.

And, finally, this paper assumes that all curriculum must have an emergent character. By this is meant that it must have the flexibility to allow for both objectives and learning experiences that result from the planned curriculum but are not expressed within in. This characteristic facilitates student input and creativity as well as spontaneous experiences. The rigidity of most programs is avoided when emergent curriculum is built into the structure. Emergent curriculum provides for vitality and change. For bilingual classrooms this is viewed as important because of the necessary interaction between the school and the community.

II.

PREPARATION OF TEACHERS FOR A ROLE IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Before teachers can assume a central role in the curriculum development process, they must have developed certain critical skills. This paper will propose two of these: (1) skills in curriculum development; and (2) a critical consciousness. Although there are probably other skills that are important, these two are essential if their role is to be a central one. It is not the purpose of this paper to formulate an exhaustive list of curriculum development skills. Rather, I will attempt to give a basic framework in which curriculum can be viewed.

First, teachers should be aware of curriculum development as a method for making decisions. Teachers, being the least consulted professional group in curriculum projects, have very often not developed this perspective. They therefore think that curriculum just is. It is because it should be. Neither overall objectives nor criteria for educational experiences are questioned. If they think about the source of curriculum at all, they may be aware that subject matter specialists have developed it (and, they assume, rightly so, for they are the experts). Only by developing this awareness can teachers then realize that if curriculum development is a decision-making process, they too can make these

decisions. The appropriateness of their role in the process thus becomes clear. Consequently, the appropriateness of others in the process also becomes evident. It is at this point that teachers become aware of curriculum development as an interaction of groups with similar interests.

Secondly, teachers should develop the skill of observing and perceiving the dynamics of children in their classrooms. Subtle changes, group interactions, and emerging interests can in this way be included as a vital part of the curriculum. In bilingual classrooms this is of particular meaning for two reasons: first, the teacher can include questions of culture as a fundamental, not a superficial, part of the curriculum; and second, the teacher can plan for different learning styles represented in the class.

A third aspect of curriculum development skills that bilingual teachers should develop concerns the ability to perceive and make of the community a valuable laboratory for the curriculum. The culture of the community, in its broadest sense, should become the culture of the classroom. Up to now, this has been manifested as mothers cooking "arroz con gandules" on Puerto Rican Day. What is proposed here goes far beyond this simplistic view of community culture. What people do for a living; the kinds of problems they face daily; their struggles for survival; their reactions to alienation; their friends; their enemies; their life-styles; their generosity and their prejudices: these are the realities that curriculum should speak to.

And, fourth, teachers should develop skills in actual construction of curriculum. Although this skill is a vital one, it is mentioned last because it is far easier to learn than the others suggested, which imply more of a sensi-

tivity to the environments in and out of school. Once these are mastered, the technical aspects of constructing lesson plans, units, and syllabi should follow almost logically.

The second basic skill, namely, developing a critical consciousness, will be defined as developing an awareness of societal realities and problems as emanating from people, not from a vacuum or from ideas. Thus, those with a critical consciousness are able to question the root causes of all phenomena. A bilingual teacher, to take one example, who is able to perceive the real reasons for the "failure" of Puerto Rican children in schools as outside the children demonstrates a critical awareness of varied forces shaping society and hindering the accomplishments of Puerto Rican youth. These include clashing class interests, corporate profits, colonialism, and ecological concerns, to name a few. Needless to say, developing a critical consciousness is a political act, for it has to do with questions of power and powerlessness.

In developing this consciousness, teachers must be aware of two levels: the nature of the students and society as a whole. The ways in which teachers view students is implied in the first. Some manifestations of this critical consciousness are:

- blaming the system, not the child, for school "failure"
- consequently, struggling to change the school system and other oppressive institutions, not the children
- accepting and valuing the culture of the child, in its broadest sense
- attempting to help children develop control over their own learning (as a precursor to controlling other parts of their lives).

On a societal level, it is necessary that teachers develop a critical consciousness for several reasons. First, although this paper is directed primarily at Hispanic teachers, they too, just as their colleagues, have become, if only in economic terms, "middle class." This means that they may now see the world through different eyes and may in fact become even more oppressive than some outright racists (the "I-made-it" syndrome is very strong). This critical consciousness, therefore, provides a "re-education" in political terms, of their roots and their painful experiences as a basis for dealing with their students. For teachers who originally came from the petty bourgeois class, of course, it is an education, period.

Another reason for developing this political perspective on a societal level is for teachers to become aware of their essential but limited role as far as broad societal changes are concerned. Idealistic teachers perform no service to Hispanic communities, for they quickly tire and become disillusioned. Only realists (although they may certainly be visionaries) concerned with the children and committed to struggle can effect any real changes. Little changes effect bigger changes as more and more people become involved in struggle on many levels. The point is that heavy doses of humility and perseverance are necessary. These can come only through a critical awareness of society as inter-related forces.

And, finally, by developing a critical consciousness, both content and form of curriculum itself are changed. Content is suggested by teachers perceiving phenomena in different ways from before (why, for example, does a unit on "Workers of the Community" always include smiling firemen and friendly policemen?

Why not factory workers and piragua makers? Why have we always learned, to take another example, that Abranam Lincoln "freed" the slaves when in reality people are the masters of their own liberation?) The form, or method of implementing curriculum is also changed by this new critical consciousness. Changes in form signal changes in relationships among people.

These skills are interdependent ones that cannot be facilitated in a purely academic setting. They are best developed through both theory and practice, through sharing ideas and struggling with them, through interaction with both children and adults. The process is a difficult one, but one that is necessary if teachers are to provide any meaning for the curriculum in a bilingual classroom.

II.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHER-INITIATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF BILINGUAL CURRICULUM

In attempting to provide some guidelines for teacher involvement in the curriculum development process, a basic framework will be proposed here: working collectives in curriculum. All considerations and recommendations will be based on this structure. By a curriculum collective is meant a group of people, all of whom share an interest in bilingual education and in the education of the children in the schools. However, no actual participants are suggested aside from the logical ones of teacher and parents. The core group itself would decide who should be part of the collective. Thus, it is conceivable that bilingual curriculum collectives would vary from school to school.

A curriculum collective also implies equal access to information, equal control of the process, and equal respect within the group; at the same time, it assumes that the overall objectives of the group are similar and that education is to be a liberating experience. These assumptions are based on the aforementioned roots of the bilingual education movement. For this reason, "curriculum collective" was preferred to "curriculum committee" on two counts. First, curriculum committees function within the already existing structures of many school systems and yet have failed to provide

any meaningful role for those who should be most central. And second, "curriculum committee" implies a passive, hierarchical, and bureaucratic structure. By changing language, we can start charging perspectives.

Because teachers are in daily contact with the schools, the children, and the community, their part as a catalytic agent for forming these curriculum collectives can be a crucial one. This would entail identifying those sectors of the community who are vital to the process; these, in turn, would suggest others. It would be hoped that the structure of the collective be fairly flexible to provide for new forces from without to influence the group. This constant renovation of the collective would help make curriculum itself more dynamic.

Once the collective was formed, the members would have to decide on a course of action. Some preliminary directions might be: forming a learning group in curriculum development; starting a seminar in bilingual education; developing stable lines of communication with other teachers and the larger community. Each of these activities would help in defining the role of the collective as a working unit. This preparatory stage to curriculum development is an essential one because it is grounded in dialogue of all the participants. Thus, the very structure of the group, the tasks it sets for itself, and its political perspective are all defined at this stage.

Following this preliminary stage, other tasks would probably become evident. The first one concerns the division of labor within the collective. By defining the tasks, the group would be able to divide the work up so that it be manageable for all concerned. Some tasks might be: determining the

needs of the learners; compiling data about appropriate content; identifying community resources; developing learning experiences inside the school and out; integrating the curriculum areas, etc. These are, naturally, decisions that would have to be made by the collective. Probably all the members would be involved in setting the priorities, the general goals, and the political perspective of the curriculum. The other tasks could be divided as the group saw fit. It would be contradictory, however, to the tenor of bilingual curriculum collectives to divide the tasks simply along professional/community lines. It is hoped, for example, that teachers might be involved in identifying community resources and parents in compiling content data. In any event, to eliminate the reinforcement of old stereotypes and to promote growth of all concerned, a rotating division of labor would be ideal.

The implementation of the curriculum, although largely in the hands of teachers, could also be influenced by the collective. For example, ongoing meetings between the curriculum collective and other bilingual teachers could be set up to compare and evaluate objectives, content, and materials. These meetings would also help determine the extent to which the general goals of the school are being met and the integration of curriculum from grade to grade. The role of the teachers would be a fundamental one, for they would not simply be carrying out orders. Rather, they would be interacting with and influencing the curriculum collective which, after all, would be responsible to the larger community of parents and teachers. Thus, the process would be a reciprocal one.

How would curriculum be evaluated in a school with this structure? Because it would be a dynamic curriculum, the assessment would have to be an on-going endeavor, even a built-in day-to-day process. Thus, in teacher meetings with the curriculum collective as well as in community meetings with the bilingual curriculum collective, information would be exchanged that would shape the emerging curriculum. No curricular decisions could be made without this evaluation because it would prove static and thus counter to the very nature of the proposed curriculum for bilingual classrooms. Naturally, this kind of on-going evaluation of content and outcomes is a far more difficult one than simply administering a pre-test and a post-test. At the same time, it is far more relevant to the nature of the curriculum collective and to effective emerging curriculum decisions that make schools more responsive to people.

In terms of evaluation of the bilingual curriculum collective itself, what is proposed here is a process of constant criticism and self-criticism to determine growth and development of the group as well as to determine the effectiveness of the methods followed. This would ensure that assessment of the bilingual curriculum collective be an on-going venture and an ever-perfectible one. At the same time, the critical consciousness of all members of the collective would be developed through this process.

IV.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided some guidelines for defining the role of the teacher as crucial in curriculum development for bilingual programs. First, the reasons for the necessity of teachers in the decision-making process was made clear. Then, a description of the skills necessary in order to assume this role was given. And finally, a framework for setting up and developing curriculum within bilingual curriculum collectives was suggested.

Very few, if any, bilingual programs function in a collective manner. Unfortunately, the corporate enterprises have again taken over, thus violating the very spirit of the struggle for bilingual education. What is proposed here is a return to power of those who dared to fight for and who won the right to a decent education for Hispanic children. Bilingual teachers were involved in this struggle. Their role, therefore, is to stand with parents, children, and others who are attempting to achieve the same objectives: a liberating education based on the values, culture, and experiences of Puerto Rican and other Hispanic people.

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